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**BEFORE THE
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

In the Matter of the Relocation)
of Emergency Slides (Crawls))
for Caption Viewers)
_____)

PETITION FOR RULEMAKING

Respectfully submitted on this
1st day of May, 1994.

By: Alan Amann
Television For All (TVFA)
National Association of
the Deaf
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and the Deaf

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Introduction:

The importance of television in American society is firmly established. From providing simple entertainment to broadcasting urgent and necessary information to millions of television viewers, its functions and roles deem it a staple in the typical American household.

The invention of closed-captioning in the late 1970's (a means of converting aural messages to a visual medium) has permitted millions of deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers to enjoy television as well as everyone else. In 1990, the Television Decoder Circuitry Act was passed, mandating that all televisions 13 inches or larger in diameter be fitted with a captioning chip which would render them receptive to closed-captioning signals. These advances illustrate clearly the growing trend towards equal access for all television viewers.

In light of these advances, however, there are still some situations in which deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers are not granted equal access to television. Such situations occur when emergency announcements, such as severe weather bulletins are broadcast visually by means of slides (also called emergency crawls), which usually appear at the bottom of television screens.

The Television for All Coalition (TVFA), comprised of over twenty-five deaf and hard-of-hearing organizations in the

Baltimore-Washington Area, is committed to total television access for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers. Such organizations in the TVFA include the National Association of the Deaf, Gallaudet University, Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc., and three different state organizations (District of Columbia Association of Deaf Citizens, Maryland Association of the Deaf, and Virginia Association of the Deaf). The relocation of emergency slides, as discussed in this petition, is a matter that is of significance to all of us in our efforts to ensure equal television access for all.

The need to provide emergency slides and captioning simultaneously and independently:

The intent of emergency slides are to warn and inform television viewers of emergencies without interrupting the programs being watched. However, those who use closed-captioning found that the captions overlap the slides, forcing these viewers to either turn off the captions in order to read the slides or to read them as they passed behind the captions. In some instances, caption viewers simply ignored the slides. In order to combat this, some television stations developed a technique of compressing the picture to provide room at the bottom of the screen for the slides. With this, though, the closed-captions are completely lost, essentially preventing people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing from following the programs they are watching, because the line that carries the

closed-captioning data, Line 21, disappears in the process of compressing the picture. In essence, the slides have severely hindered the efficiency and purpose of the captions, and vice versa. In light of this, it is our position that television stations should provide slides in a manner that is fully compatible with closed-captioning.

The need to establish new F.C.C. regulations to address this issue:

According to existing Federal Communications Commission regulations concerning television emergency broadcasts, the broadcasts may be transmitted either aurally and visually or only visually. 47 C.F.R. § 73.1250 (h). These regulations were amended on July 31, 1985, and do not take slides and captions into consideration; the loss of captions for digitally compressed video and the overlap between captions and slides for regular video is a concern that should be addressed by means of new F.C.C. regulations. Such regulations may include recommendations of various methods that have been developed to permit slides and captions to appear on the same screen unimpaired.

Methods for simultaneous provision:

As of now, there are two successful methods that accomplish the goal of providing closed-captioning and emergency slides simultaneously and independently. Television broadcasters may simply relocate the slides to the top of the television screen,

thus providing emergency messages while allowing the captions to function unimpaired. There are some concerns about this method, though, as some feel that it interrupts the aesthetics of the program.

The other method involves compressing the picture, thus allowing room at the top or bottom of the screen for the captions and emergency crawls. While this preserves the integrity and aesthetics of the pictorial composition, the process of compressing it involves digitally modifying an analog picture, thus causing the picture to lose Line 21, the line that carries the closed-captioning data. Because of this, pictures that are compressed are not able to show captions. There is, however, a new system that allows broadcasters to compress the picture while retaining closed-captions - the "Television Online Bi-screen Information" (TOBI) system. This system allows the broadcaster to recover the data on Line 21 and use it as a background, thus allowing the broadcaster to provide the compressed picture in conjunction with the slides and closed-captioning. This method has been used successfully by WRC-TV in Washington, D.C., and requires the use of equipment known as "Digital Video Effects" (DVE).

Request for Federal mandate of provision of full accessibility during emergency broadcasts:

We hereby petition the Federal Communications Commission to develop and implement regulations that ensure equal access to

television for viewers in times of emergency broadcasts, especially during the use of slides. We voice our recognition of and support for the two methods of achieving this goal which are discussed above, and we request that the F.C.C. require the simultaneous transmission of emergency slides and closed-captioning in a manner that does not impede the viewer's ability to understand and enjoy the program's content.

Respectfully submitted,



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